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ABSTRACT

The reading of a literary work can give rise to five different kinds of literary knowing: (1) knowing about self; (2) knowing about others; (3) knowing about texts; (4) knowing about contexts; and (5) knowing about processes of making meaning. A literary work can prompt a reader to reflect upon aspects of his or her own life. Concentrating upon individual responses to texts allows students to see and learn from similarities and differences among classmates. A text also provides an opportunity for taking pleasure in the writer's artistry. Making meaning depends in part upon the context in which the reader and the text come together. Students can learn something about their own processes of making meaning from texts. Journals and reading logs can be designed to initiate exchanges between students as to how text readings can differ. Such approaches suggest that the expository, analytical essay is not to be over-emphasized. Other genres can also be suitable for the classroom. There should be a correlation between what students go through as they grow up and what great writers have written about. It may be possible to find organizing principles in the transactions between writer and text. The next step is to redesign the curriculum into a structure that respects the uniqueness of the reader. (Three diagrams are included.) (SG)

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Five Kinds of Literary Knowing

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Competing Conceptions of Literature

Consider two points of view on the poem. Wellek and Warren (1956) speak of the "normative character of the genuine poem." It is a "simple fact," they say, that:

> it might be experienced correctly or incorrectly. In every individual experience only a small part can be considered as adequate to the true poem. Thus, the real poem must be conceived as a structure of norms, realized only partially in the actual experience of its many readers. Every single experience (reading, reciting, and so forth) is only an attempt - more or less successful and complete - to grasp this set of norms or standards. (pp. 138-9)

What this means, of course, is that we are all deficient, defective readers. "You can read this poem incorrectly," it says, "and you probably will; your experience will be barely adequate, partial, and incomplete; you'll attempt, but fail, to grasp the true poem, the pure meaning." There is a genuine poem; and then, on the other hand, there is your feeble reading. Do what you will, the genuine poem is beyond your scope. In that last verb, "to grasp," we see the desperate reader, fingers clutching frantically, futilely, for any life-ring, any floating timber, any flotsam or jetsam of meaning, and sinking slowly, helplessly, beneath the quiet linguistic surfaces of the text.

Wellek and Warren represent, more or less, some fundamental assumptions shared by the New Critics. Perhaps most significant of these is the notion that the literary work sets the standard by which a reading may be judged. They are somewhat vague about what those norms are, and even *where* they are:

> The norms we have in mind are implicit norms which have to be extracted from every individual experience of a work of art and together make up the genuine work of art as a whole. (p. 139)

Although they seem here to say that the norms are in the collective experience of all the poem's readers, the sum of all their experiences with the text, they have said earlier that the real poem "is not an individual experience or a sum of experiences, but only a potential cause of experiences" (p. 138). Those norms, then, wherever they may be, are less in the readers and their experiences than in the text. The text sets the norms, dictates its own reading. Our task, if we accept that vision of literature, becomes a process of extracting, inferring, interpreting. The text is the container - or at least the arbiter - of meaning, and our goal is to remove that meaning as completely and accurately as we can.

That conception of literature and literary experience has unfortunate consequences for students. First of all, it assures them that they will fail. They may fail more or less badly, but they are doomed to fail. As fallible, imperfect, flawed readers trapped within our own history, limited by what our unique experience has provided for us and withheld from us, we have little

hope of achieving that perfect reading postulated by such theories as those of Wellek and Warren. Our individuality, our unique perception and valuation of the world, prevents us from fully grasping those norms - whatever they may be - implicit within the literary work. The conception of the "real poem" as a structure of norms leaves us, like poor Tantalus, clutching at grapes that forever elude us.

And although, by definition, all of us are deficient, some are more deficient than others. The notion of the genuine poem establishes a hierarchy of readers, with the most renowned critic at the top, other published scholars a rung or two below, depending on the number and respectability of their publications, other professors and teachers several steps further down the ladder, and finally, at the bottom, most deficient of all, the student. The concept of the perfect reading, the hierarchy of readers, and the inevitability of failure conspire to diminish the individual reader, especially student readers. Their readings, after all, can be of little significance in this scheme of things. They are novices, uninitiated, and therefore unlikely to approach the ideal reading. Their experiences with the text are thus less meaningful, less significant, less of everything, than is the reading of the established, respected critic.

Only in the readings of the preeminent critics, the authorities, can the genuine poem be approximated. Consequently, university students, predictably and probably wisely, given these assumptions about literature, have depended upon the published criticism and distrusted their own experience with texts. And in the high schools, students have depended upon Cliffs Notes or other such eviscerations of literary works rather than the works themselves. The simple outlines and summary judgments offered by such truncations are, after all, what the schools seem to be seeking. These paraphrases have extracted the approved interpretation, summarized the respected critical judgments, and so they represent, in simple, readable prose, the norms toward which students would, in their absence, have to labor. And if those extractions from the texts are, in fact, what we are after, then it makes perfectly good sense to by-pass the works themselves in favor of the published summaries and interpretations. Given the choice, most of us would prefer shelled pecans to hours laboring with a nutcracker.

Rosenblatt (1978) offers another point of view. She speaks of the poem as:

> an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being. (p. 12)

Rosenblatt flatly contradicts Wellek and Warren, offering us a different conception of literary experience, with drastically different implications for the classroom. The poem, in this vision of literature, does not reside in the text, or in the realm of the ideal. Rather, it is an event, a specific encounter, a momentary happening. It is a meeting of reader and text. The poem is the experience of a particular reader performing with a particular text.

Perhaps this is, and should always have been, obvious. Words, ink on paper, function symbolically, and symbols operate only within the mind. A text in a language we can't read yields no poetic or literary experience, not because the text is inadequate, but because we are

unable to perform symbolically with it. The words remain nothing more than ink on paper. Only when they enter a reader's mind do they come to life. And, since each mind is unique, as anyone who has ever ventured into a seventh-grade classroom - or first-grade, or twelfth-grade, or any other grade - will attest, the life they take on for each reader is inevitably different. Your poem and my poem *cannot* be the same, though we make them from the same text.

A text does not become a poem until a reader comes along and, by reading it, makes one out of the experience. The notion that the poem is in the reader - or perhaps in the act of reading - rather than in the text or in the ethereal ideal rearranges matters within the critical community. The poem is now attainable. It becomes mine. And, of course, yours, and our students'. Our readings are no longer the flawed efforts of hopelessly inadequate readers to attain unattainable norms, to seize that genuine poem Wellek and Warren insist is ever beyond our grasp. Rather, our readings *are* the poems; each is the unique literary experience made possible by the encounter of a certain reader with a certain text in certain circumstances.

Rosenblatt's vision insists that we, the readers, are important factors. If the text only becomes a poem when it is read, then we must take the reader into account, as well as the writer and the text, when we wish to speak of literature.

A Text and Its Poems

Consider a short poem - or rather, text, as Rosenblatt would have us use the terms - in light of these two visions of literature. What can we make of Frost's (1949) "The Secret Sits," for example?

> We dance round in a ring and suppose,
> But the Secret sits in the middle and knows. (p. 495)

What is the perfect, pure, genuine poem, the norm implicit in this text? What would the perfect reading look like, that pure, pristine, crystalline reading uncontaminated, unsullied, by the seamy recesses of our idiosyncratic minds and our unique souls? The text gives us little upon which to work our interpretive charms. Frost's "We" is a bit imprecise; on our students papers we might complain about the uncertain pronoun reference, and "the Secret" is worse yet. What secret - is there a god; how do salmon find their home; who will win the World Series? And what does this secret know? What possible way is there for us to know whether we have experienced this text "correctly or incorrectly," whether our attempt "to grasp this set of norms" has been more successful, or less so?

Frost's text does not submit happily to the analytic, inferential, interpretive strategies implicit in Wellek and Warren's conception of the "genuine poem." It doesn't reward our efforts to grasp it in that way. We could argue, of course, that it is an unsuccessful text. And we may very well do that. The critical approaches promoted by Wellek and Warren value complexity and obscurity in texts because those features give the critic problems to solve, materials with which to work. Less problematic texts may yield less to the analysis and thus may be seen as less valuable. And more problematic texts, ones that prove too complex and obscure for effective interpretation, may be viewed simply as unintelligible.

Or, on the other hand, we could accept the text as successful and employ intertextual strategies to divine its norms, its meaning. We could examine other Frost writings, read his biographies, talk with his friends. But if we grant that a text ought to have some independent vitality, that a literary text ought to have some life of its own, not totally divorced from other texts, other information, but neither totally dependent upon it, then "The Secret Sits" shouldn't demand all that labor.

If "The Secret" works at all for us, it does so because it invites us in to perform with it. It works, if it does, because we have questions, because we suspect that there are secret answers out there somewhere and that we are dancing futilely around them in circles, never drawing any closer to understanding. If we begin to reflect upon our own confusions, or in some other way engage the text personally, rather than try to figure out precisely what structure of norms lies beneath the words, then we are more likely to consider the reading successful. There would be, in Rosenblatt's terms, a compenetration, a coming-together of reader and text. In responding to the text, we would be marshaling our own resources, crystallizing out of memory, thought, and feeling, a new experience.

Though it isn't a striving for the perfect reading, the structure of norms, Frost might nonetheless approve. Dickey (1965) surely would. "I am for the individual's reaction," he says, "whatever extraneous material it includes, and against all critical officialdom." In poetry, Dickey (1987) argues, we should hope for:

> words to come together into some kind of magical conjunction that will make the reader enter into a real experience of his own - *not* the poet's. I don't really believe what literary critics have believed from the beginning of time: that poetry is an attempt of the poet to create or recreate his own experience and to pass it on. . . . I believe it's an awakening of the sensibilities of someone else, the stranger." (p. 105)

The poem is, then, a unique event in the intellectual life of the reader.

Problems and Implications

By insisting upon the poem as event, Rosenblatt resituates the literary experience, placing it a social context. The poem becomes an exchange, a happening, a transaction. It occurs, between a reader and a text, and among readers. That conception of literature poses some problems for the classroom.

First of all, if the poem is a performance, a unique meeting of reader and text, then the issue of correctness becomes difficult. Wellek and Warren (1956) have said that it is a simple fact that the poem can be read correctly or incorrectly. If there is a norm, a best reading, then the correctness of other readings can be judged by how closely they approximate that best reading. Thus the most persuasive critics become preeminent, their interpretations become the touchstone by which other readings are judged, and students are subtly encouraged to submit to and imitate the thinking of their critical betters. A student's experience with a text is always subject to someone else's evaluation, and it is always, more or less, wrong. But correctness is not so easily assessed if there is no norm, no perfect reading, not even a hypothetical one, to serve as a benchmark.

Correctness becomes, in Rosenblatt's conception of literary experience, a virtually useless concept. It may even be a dangerous concept, because it encourages us to seek standards by which we may measure the rightness of statements about literary experience, by which we may order responses to literature on a scale from better to worse, and standards such as those tend to impose a uniformity or homogeneity that the uniqueness of the human personality does not allow.

That is not to say, of course, that there are *no* aspects of literary experience whose correctness can be judged. If we read the word "proscribe" in a text and think "prescribe," or if we read the word "infer" and think "imply," then we have made a mistake. We are incorrect. But the whole of the literary transaction is not so simply judged.

Similarly, we have to, if not give up, then at least question, the pedagogic and critical goal of interpretive uniformity. To teach the right and proper interpretation, the correct reading, is to ignore the limitless variability of the human experience. If the poem is created in the act of reading, and if each reader - as he or she must - creates the poem not out of the text alone, but out of the encounter between text and personal perspective and circumstance, then there is no right interpretation to teach. One text, read by 30 students, will yield 30 poems. Though the text may remain constant, unchanging, the minds that engage it must all be unique, and so the poems must be unique.

Granted, we may set confining questions, interpretive questions perhaps, of the sort that do lend themselves to argument and proof. Questions about the attitudes and beliefs of the writer as revealed by a text, about the likely effects of historical events, about the probable borrowings from or influence of other writers - all these can be argued and the arguments judged to be more or less persuasive. But if we accept Rosenblatt's vision of literary experience then we must speculate about the possibility that we may also perform in other ways with texts, that producing interpretations is not the only possibility. We may also admit into the discourse such unique and diverse matters as memories, personal experiences, feelings, images called to mind by, but not contained in, the texts read. And we may accept, as legitimate modes of discourse resulting from literary experiences, poems of our own, letters, adaptations, story-telling, private journal entries, and the like. On such matters as these there is no need to achieve unanimity and consensus - they are personal, individual, unique, but a central part of the literary transaction.

If we accept the idea that the poem is in the reader reading rather than in the text, then we lose, as guiding principles, not only correctness and interpretive uniformity, but also comprehension as it has usually been defined. Traditional views of comprehension - understood as the remembering of information, or as the producing of statements of theme, main idea, and the like, that conform to some predetermined norm - can no longer be considered adequate goals for instruction. Comprehension, as it is traditionally viewed in reading instruction, implies a submission to the text. Students comprehend if they extract information accurately and remember it, if they see the logic or structure of a text, if they draw correct inferences about the author's purpose. All of those are important abilities, but along with them, if we are to allow the full range of possibilities, we must encourage readers to attend to their own conceptions, their own experience, bringing the literary work to bear upon their lives and their lives to shed light upon the work. (Current views of reading comprehension as an interactive and transactional process [see Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1984, for example] also stress the reader's role in comprehension.)

However, more traditional conceptions of comprehension (upon which many textbooks are based) too easily leave the work as a thing apart from the reader, an object outside of the reader to be worked upon. The reader comes to it, takes something from it, and departs virtually unchanged. It is, perhaps, an adequate model for the reading of some sorts of informational texts, but it is not adequate for the reading of literary works. It neglects the personal experience that is brought to, and that may be reshaped by, the act of reading.

Again, that is not to say that comprehension is irrelevant. Readers who miss major events in a story, who fail to comprehend the rudiments of the plot, are not likely to get as much from the reading as those who catch more of the action. But to remember all that happened - comprehending fully - without engaging the work personally is to miss much of the literary experience as Rosenblatt has defined it. And to encourage students to try to remember all the little details, implying that successful reading can be measured by the recall of massive amounts of trivial information, may well be to shackle their minds so that literary experience becomes virtually impossible.

Purpose and Pattern in Teaching Literature

Response criticism, especially Rosenblatt's work, has suggested a great deal about the methods of teaching both reading and writing appropriate for the literature program. Teachers of literature have always hoped for close and careful reading, of course, but the critical issue raised by Rosenblatt's work is the question, "Close to what?" Efforts to make students read closely have tended to do so by asking them to suppress their own feelings and ignore their own associations and memories, and that is likely to make the reading distant and falsely objective, rather than close.

A reading that really respects the integrity of the text must also pay attention, close attention, to the readers' responses, thoughts, feelings, and memories, because without that close attention to self readers have no way of knowing where anything comes from. They have to define themselves against the background of the text, and the text against the background they themselves provide. Similarly, they must learn to pay attention to the shaping influence of context on the meaning and significance of the literary work.

Rosenblatt's vision of literary experience suggests that we might appropriately broaden our conception of the literature curriculum so that it includes attention to more than just features of texts and information about writers, periods, and techniques. Until now, most literature curricula have been devised on the basis of information we have accumulated about texts. The typical twelfth-grade literature course, for instance, is British literature, organized historically. Moving chronologically from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf, it explores periods, influences, movements, developments - that is to say, it invites the students to learn the information we provide them about the history of British literature. The same observations may be made about the eleventh-grade course, where American literature is likely to be the topic. At other grade levels, other patterns dominate. Arrangement by genre is fairly common, with texts divided into sections on poetry, drama, essays, and so forth.

Courses such as these betray our tendency to look for organizing principles in the information *we* have acquired about texts, virtually ignoring the transactions students are likely

to have with texts. And we do so for obvious reasons. Those transactions are harder to describe, to predict, to manage, to arrange. If we look to the history of literature for our organizing principles we find the year's instruction falling neatly into place. We know where we should begin, and where, if time allows, we will end. Furthermore, goals and objectives come quickly to mind, and we know how to find a huge reservoir of information to fill the days. Lessons, questions to ask for discussion, and essays to assign are all suggested by the historical arrangement. We can ask about the influences of Christianity evident in Beowulf, the characteristics of Elizabethan drama, the social circumstances that affected the development of the novel, the dissatisfactions of the Romantic poets with their immediate predecessors. . . .

The problem, however, is that little of this curriculum, its goals, and the teaching that prevails within it, may attend much at all to the nature of the students' transactions with texts. It may encourage the students to acquire information about texts, but it may not entice them to read those texts. And yet it seems possible that we could reconceive literature instruction so that it would reflect the vision of literary experience as a coming-together of reader and text, as a significant event in a reader's intellectual and emotional life.

Rosenblatt's vision suggests that literary experience is a significant way of coming to know about more than texts. Consider, for example, the possibilities in such a text as "Sign for My Father, Who Stressed the Bunt" by David Bottoms (1985).

Knowing about Self

We could read "Sign for My Father" focussing upon the text itself, and learn something about metaphor and rhythm. We could see it as a representative of twentieth-century poetry and discuss its contemporary imagery. We could consider it an example of Southern poetry, and speculate about the significance of narrative and of the colloquial voice in poetry from this region. We could, perhaps, look at it as biographical critics might, and reflect upon, perhaps even conduct research into, the connections between this text and Bottoms' life.

But we might also, if inclination led us in this direction and if the classroom allowed, reflect upon aspects of our own lives evoked by the transaction with the text. The literary transaction is first of all a way of knowing something about the self. It is quite likely, for instance, that a reader of this text might find him- or herself recalling personal experiences that were somehow connected with the text. We might be able to predict some of the themes or patterns in those transactions, but we would be unable to predict the form they might take, or the details. Some may well have to do with the relationship of parent and child - that wouldn't surprise us - but in other readings other concerns may surface, some of them perhaps unexpected.

In one discussion, for instance, a reader (an adult - not a secondary school student) remarked about the decreasing political and intellectual distance she observed between her and her parents. She wondered aloud if that revealed a weakening of commitment on her part, an unconscious slide toward a more conservative view, or if, as had the speaker in Bottoms' text, she was beginning to get a grip on something her parents had understood. Was she moving forward - or backwards? There was at least the possibility that further reflection on her reading, on the questions it had awakened in her, might have led her to some sharpened insight into her own mind, and perhaps into her parents' attitudes. Here was an opportunity for the

transaction with a text to lead to understanding of the self.

It could be objected, of course, that reflection on those matters departs from the text and is unlikely to lead to thorough and accurate interpretation. If we view literary reading as nothing more than the drawing of defensible inferences about authors' intentions, or the explicating of patterns within texts, or the unearthing of relationships among texts - nothing more, in other words, than the making and proving of propositions about the text - then the objection is well-founded. But if we see literary reading as something more complex, an experience in which our own memories, perceptions, values, and ideas may be explored and shaped, then the objection is less significant. We may grant that the reader was not focussing her thoughts upon the text, but she *was* reflecting upon her transaction with the text, and that transaction included the awakening of private memories and thoughts. If they mattered enough to her to pursue them further, reconsidering her own history, clarifying her understanding of herself, then the text will have served her well, even if she has not bothered to make demonstrable propositions about it.

That reading dealt with issues that many - probably most - of the readers thought clearly tied to the text. Another reading, however, surprised at least some members of the group. A second reader in that same group reported her annoyance at the masculinity of the poem. It was, she objected, a male poem, with male characters, about male experiences. Her transaction with the text had led to expressions of her attitudes, not about parent-child relationships, as many of us might have expected, but about the relationships of men and women, especially those relationships having to do with power. Again, as with the first reading, the transaction provided an opportunity for a reader to articulate perceptions and attitudes. Both readings, different as they were, allowed readers to sharpen their understanding of themselves.

It seems reasonable that learning about oneself might be a legitimate purpose for the study of literature. The significance of introspection and reflection on one's own values and beliefs, one's own place in the culture, should be recognized, and our teaching should invite and encourage such exploration. We might do so by beginning with such questions as these, phrased, of course, in language appropriate for the age and ability of the group:

What feelings did this text evoke in you as you read?

Did this text awaken any memories, recall for you any people, or places, or experiences?

What are your first, uncensored, thoughts about this text?

Some teachers have found it useful to allow students five or ten minutes, immediately after reading a shorter text, to write their reactions to questions such as these, or simply to write freely whatever comes to mind, rather than asking them to begin discussing immediately. The silent writing gives students time to crystallize their own reactions, to find some words, perhaps tentative and halting, for elusive thoughts and feelings, and thus enables them to offer something to subsequent discussion.

The brief paragraphs produced in these few minutes serve as material for talk about the literary experience. They may be handled in a wide variety of ways. The teacher might simply begin the discussion with a very open-ended question: "What are your thoughts?" Or he may

ask four or five students to read aloud, or to summarize, what they have written, and try to identify, with the help of the class, several patterns or themes in the responses that might serve as the organizing issues for the talk. Students might be cast arbitrarily into small groups and given some time to share their notes and identify issues worth discussing when the entire class reconvenes. One teacher preferred, at least occasionally, to collect the written responses and ask students to reread the text while she quickly and intuitively sorted them into four or five stacks. She then placed students in the discussion groups that resulted and asked them to consider the similarities and differences in their readings.

These questions, the short written responses, and the discussions that emerge from them, are all intended to have students respect their own readings, and to invite them to use the experience as a way to articulate and investigate their own emotions and thoughts. The goal is sharpened understanding of the self, exploration of diversity and commonality, not consensus on an interpretation.

With longer works, the same goal - coming to know oneself better - may be pursued through the use of journals or reading logs. Teachers have set up such journals in various ways, but most of them have students read and take notes, not just on what is transpiring in the text, but on the associations,emotions, and ideas, whatever they may be, that surface during the reading. One form, for example, requires paired entries, with one column for notes about what is happening in the text and the other for the reader's comments about it:

Notes . .	Comments . .

Another requires three entries, the first an immediate reaction, the second later reflection, and the third notes on possibilities for writing of one's own:

Immediate Reaction...	Later Reflection...	Reading/ Writing Experiment

Drawing upon these journals, we might begin discussion by instructing students:

Now that you've read the chapter (novel, essay, play) and recorded what happened as you read, read back over your notes and think back over the experience. What is your own sense of the text or of the experience it offered you--does it have any significance for you; does it recall memories, associations; does it affirm or contradict any of your own attitudes or perceptions?

We might hope that the outcome of discussions focussed upon the readers' feelings and thoughts, upon their perceptions of both text and unique personal experience, would be further insight into themselves. That insight should be the first goal of the literature classroom.

Knowing about Others

One virtually inevitable result of concentrating upon individual responses to texts is that students will see similarities and differences within the classroom. They will notice that readers make sense of texts in different ways, that significance and meaning depend as much upon the reader as upon the text. Too often, unless they are encouraged to see it otherwise, the existence of these differences will be seen as evidence of a hierarchy of readings, some better than others, and attributed to differences in skill or intelligence or diligence. Students will likely have been encouraged for much of their schooling to judge their own statements in terms of correctness, assuming that the knowledge they are seeking - or avoiding - is something outside them, something that may be judged by externally imposed standards.

They might, however, be encouraged to see these differences as indications of the uniqueness of each reader, and as opportunities to learn something about others. The reader who had objected to the maleness of Bottom's poem, for instance, was challenged by another

reader, a woman, who argued that although the metaphor of baseball *was* male, the text was about any parent-child relationship, whether between father and son, mother and daughter, or any other combination. And that reader was then challenged by still another, who asserted that *she* had played a great deal of baseball as a child, and that the game was not exclusively for men. Each reader created a unique poem, a synthesis of text and personal experience, from the words Bottoms had provided.

The discussion of their various readings gave them an opportunity to learn something about one another. That sort of learning has seldom been an explicit goal of the literature curriculum. If, however, literary studies are to communicate the cultural heritage, to help with the assimilation of the individual into the society, then it seems reasonable to begin with efforts to acquaint the students with one another. Literature should socialize, humanize. It should offer us the chance to sharpen our insights into the human condition.

Those several students who traded comments on "Sign for My Father" may not have been expressing profound, eternal truths, but we may hope for some value in their exchange of perceptions. We may hope that they will gradually grow more accepting of the differences among people, better able to consider viewpoints other than their own, and perhaps thus more likely to grow intellectually.

Teachers interested in encouraging students to come to understand one another better may do so, in part, by acknowledging the validity of that kind of knowing, and by setting up discussion and writing designed to call attention to the similarities and differences among readers. Questions that focus upon readers, rather than upon texts, are appropriate. We may, for instance, pair students and offer the following instructions for a discussion:

> Please discuss your readings with your partner. Talk about the memories, the thoughts, and the feelings each of you had as you read. What similarities and differences do you notice in your experiences with the text? Was the reading more pleasant, or annoying, for one than for the other? What accounts--or what might account--for those differences?

For longer works, a reading log designed to initiate some exchanges between students may help. This one, requiring four entries, is laid out to cover two adjacent pages in a notebook:

Notes on the text...	Response	Comment (by another student)	Reply...

It sets up a written exchange between students. Working on a novel, for example, students may be asked, after each chapter has been read, with notes on and responses to the text entered into the first two columns, to trade logs with another student. Students would then read through the notes and responses they now have in hand and write comments that come to mind. The journals would then be returned to their owners who would be asked to reply. Exchanges such as these suggest a great deal of material for the class discussions, and may lead students to see the text, themselves, and one another more clearly.

Other designs for the classroom make learning about another student the explicit purpose of the activity. One, a structured interview, divides the class into pairs, each of which is given two short texts so that each student may serve once as the reader and once as the interviewer. Students are then asked to move through the following steps:

1. One student will be designated the interviewer; the other the reader. Interviewers should quickly read through the text, while the readers wait.

2. The readers should then read the text, talking about it as they go. They should make any comments that come to mind - about memories that arise, feelings that are evoked, problems or confusions with the text itself, or anything else. The interviewers should take notes, as thorough as possible, on everything the readers say.

3. The readers should then read it again, commenting further, trying to elaborate upon earlier remarks, catching any thoughts that they failed to mention on the first reading, noting anything new that comes to them.

4. After the second reading, the interviewers should ask for clarification of anything unclear the readers may have said, or for elaboration on any points. Again, they take notes.

5. The interviewers should then go through their notes, circling the 3-5 most interesting, problematic, or confusing points. They comment on or ask a question about each, again taking notes on the replies.

6. The interviewers should then discuss the reading, telling the readers anything interesting they observed, wondered about, speculated. It is a report, however, not an evaluation.

7. Readers and interviewers now trade roles and run through steps 1-5 again, using the other text.

8. Each student should now take the notes he/she has accumulated and use them to write a page or so about the partner's reading of the text. [An option at this point - one that places less emphasis upon learning about the other reader - is to turn all the notes over to the readers, when the discussion is finished, so that they may use them in writing about their own readings of the text.]

There are several purposes for the pattern - one is simply to slow down the reading, encouraging productive pauses. A second is to provide helpful responses - prods, questions, reactions - that might stimulate further thought about the reading. A third is to encourage

some collegiality among students, to cast them into the role of helper for one another, while giving them some guidance in that role. And the fourth is to invite them to come to know one another better.

Knowing about Texts

Traditionally, the emphasis in the classroom has fallen most heavily upon learning about texts. That's understandable - it is easier to organize information than it is to organize such unpredictable matter as transactions, and we have, furthermore, a great deal of information about texts. That information can both fill and structure our time, suggesting courses arranged historically in the upper grades, perhaps by genre in the junior high schools. Much of the information we offer students in these courses is of dubious value, but clearly it *is* important that they learn how texts work upon them, controlling and directing them, either intentionally or inadvertently.

It is worth noting, for instance, how the images in "Sign" conspire to evoke memories and to suggest significances beyond their obvious reference. The home run contrasted with the sacrifice bunt, for example, suggesting the contrast between grand dreams and necessary sacrifices; the association of the home run with youth and the sacrifice with maturity, suggesting that age brings with it wisdom - or is it just a loss of hope? What the individual reader will make of such images we cannot say, but we can notice the patterns, observe our reactions, speculate about the intent.

The last stanza, for example, presents some readers with the image of a young man growing wiser, finally realizing what his father has taught him; to others it has offered the image of a young man growing old and tired, accepting the despairing visions, the loss of hope, for which his father tried to prepare him. Observing patterns within the text and its effects upon various readers will enable students to take control over texts rather than to submit to them, to define their own perspectives against those offered by the text. The reader, for example, who rejected Bottoms' text because it dealt with male issues may perhaps, after discussion and reflection, decide that it could be read in another way, one in which the sex of the characters is irrelevant. The images, annoying as they may have been to her at first, could lead her to reflect on aspiration and sacrifice, or perhaps on other matters of personal significance. If so, she will have learned something about how texts work, and about how readers must work with texts.

A text such as "Sign" also provides an opportunity for taking some pleasure in the artistry of the writer. A student familiar with baseball may be able to point out the baseball terms that function metaphorically throughout the poem - the "tiresome pitch," "laying down," and of course "sacrifice" and "sign." And those observations may lead to speculation about the possible metaphoric significance of other words as well. The bunt, dropped "like a seed," may suggest to some readers that the father's teaching was itself a seed in the young man's mind, barely noticed at first, but blossoming years later.

Students invited to respond to texts will often observe and comment on aspects of the text as they explain their reactions, explore the problems they encounter, and attempt to deal with differences in the readings offered by classmates. We might occasionally encourage students to look more closely at texts from the outset by asking them to compare their

perceptions:

> What did you see happening in the text? Paraphrase it - retell the event briefly. What image was called to mind by the text? Describe it briefly. Upon what, in the text, did you focus most intently as you read - what word, phrase, image, idea? What is the most important word in the text?

Often, simple paraphrase will reveal radically different readings that sustain discussion for quite awhile. The teacher's greatest problem when that happens is to make sure that the talk does not become a debate, that students do not fall back into the assumption that there is a right interpretation, that someone is correct and the others are wrong. The teacher needs to encourage students to consider other readings in building their own understanding of texts. It is occasionally appropriate to focus discussion on inferences about the intention and assumptions of the author, the beliefs or values of characters within stories, the influence of historical events upon writers, and the like. When the talk deals with those matters, then distinctions can and should be made between stronger and less effective reasoning.

It is, of course, possible to be wrong, to be incorrect, in an assertion about a text, and students need to learn that some statements commit them to demonstration or argument. Students must learn to make the distinction between attributive statements: those that purport to describe objects or events in the world outside the reader's mind; and expressive statements: those that describe the state of the mind itself. A reader who asserts that this text is about football is flatly wrong; the reader who reports that the text calls to mind for him memories of football, if we assume that he is telling the truth, is flatly right. The reader who asserts that the speaker in the poem resents his father's instruction is perhaps less indisputably wrong, but he is likely to have a difficult time mustering the evidence for that assertion in the text. It may be that his thought arises not out of the text, but out of other experience, perhaps with his own father or his teachers, and so the statement may well be worth exploring. Demonstrably incorrect assertions about texts may lead to meaning if they are explored delicately. Looking within the text may reveal the importance of looking elsewhere.

Knowing about Contexts

Making meaning out of literary experience is not a simple matter of analyzing the text. That sort of inquiry may be valuable in determining the validity of some propositions about the text or its author, but meaning and significance are more complex. They depend not on text alone, nor on the reader alone, but on the context in which reader and text come together as well. It is important for students to understand that, and it is easy to demonstrate.

With "Sign," students should be able to speculate about, if they cannot actually observe within the class, the shaping effects of a reader's context. They may be asked, for instance, to consider how a reader might deal with the text:

> if he were very young, and felt badly confined and constrained by a dictatorial, tyrannical parent,
>
> if he had just lost his father in an accident,

if he were a father with a son who had dreams of glory but no inclination to work for them.

They may be asked to consider how they themselves might have read the poem five years ago; how they might read it ten years from now; how their own parents might read it? They may be asked to consider how the context of the classroom affected what they could do with the text. Were there, for example, thoughts that they censored or ignored because the text was dealt with publicly, rather than in the privacy of a journal?

They may even be encouraged to take texts such as this one into other settings, with other groups, and observe the differences. A poem like "Sign," dealing as it does with parent-child relationships, might well be taken home and discussed with parents. "What was it like," you may ask them, "to talk about this text in your home with your parents?" Or it may be taken into an elementary school classroom where it might be responded to by younger children. They might then write about the question, "What effect did the discussion with younger children have on your reading of this text?"

Knowing about Processes (of Making Meaning)

Finally, students need to learn something about their own processes of making meaning from texts. This is a subtle and difficult matter, perhaps, but at the very least students can come to see that meaning is not magically achieved. They often have the impression that teachers simply know. They don't know how they know, they don't know where the insight originates, they don't know how teachers come to understand, but they know that teachers know and they don't. Students have too often been presented meanings and interpretations already made, finished, complete, and they have too seldom seen the stumbling, tentative, hesitating process of making meaning out of texts.

Possibly the single best way teachers may do this is to teach texts that they have never seen before. A colleague trusted not to sabotage the class can be asked to provide 30 copies of a suitable poem. Everyone begins then from the same position. The text is as new to the teacher as it is to the students, the burden of knowing what it means is lifted from the teacher, and he or she is allowed to muddle around in the text, making probing, tentative remarks, remembering other texts, other events, discarding some as irrelevant or uninteresting and focussing on others, hypothesizing, interpreting, reinterpreting, expressing personal feelings and telling stories called to mind - doing in public before the students, in other words, what they must do themselves to make sense of texts.

Students may observe that they attack texts in different ways. It is interesting, for example, to occasionally reformat a short text, perhaps a story, so that it occupies only the left half of pages, leaving a wide right margin in which students are asked to record, as they read, the thoughts, feelings, and responses that come to mind. With some groups, the differences are striking. In one class an irritated student reported that she was absolutely unable to interrupt the reading in order to make the notes. She said that she was sorry, but that she had given up on the activity, read through to the end of the story, and then gone back and tried to recall or recreate her responses and jot them down at the appropriate spot in the margin. In that same class another student reported that he had begun to write after reading a few paragraphs of the story, and had grown so interested in what he was writing that he failed to return to the story

at all. He followed his thoughts so far afield that the text itself faded into insignificance for him.

Those two students may represent opposite ends of the spectrum, but differences are often apparent in the reactions of other readers, too. Some raise questions, some make interpretive statements, some express feelings, some are coldly analytical and intellectual, some tell stories or record memories. Some seem to have no preference or pattern, and do a little of everything.

Teachers can make the point that there are many ways of entering texts, and that we may profit by broadening our repertoire. The questions we present about literary works are, then, very important and have to be carefully considered. They should encourage students to learn something about themselves, about texts, about other readers, about contexts (the classroom setting, other literary works, and so on), and about the processes by which meaning is made from literary texts. For them to read closely, they have to be aware of all of those elements - they all contribute to meaning. Meaning does not reside in the text alone, as we have sometimes assumed. The problem, of course, is to find enough varied ways of asking those questions. And to find works that are provocative enough to sustain the labor implicit in the questions. But both those problems are solvable.

Toward Instructional Change

This vision of literature instruction carries with it several implications for instruction. First of all, it suggests that we not over-emphasize the expository, analytical essay. We need to teach it, but it is not the only genre suitable for the literature classroom. Of course, there should be sufficient attention to the interpretive, analytical essay, but students will write them more effectively if the works they deal with are significant to them, and if the essays are part of a real dialogue. Interpretive essays, for instance, might be most appropriate when there is some real disagreement about a text. The talk in the classroom could then lead into the writing of a more extended and carefully planned argument than oral discourse allows. Those papers themselves could then be the substance for further work; students could even be asked to write analyses of the arguments of their classmates.

Some of the writing we ask students to do, however, should be in other modes than the essay. If poetry and fiction are legitimate ways of making meaning, then we should have students try their hands at them. Students in music classes aren't asked just to listen and appreciate - they are invited to hum a tune or pound on a drum; literature students should similarly be asked to hum a poem once or twice during their schooling. Some writing might be very personal, perhaps the telling of one's own stories as they are called to mind by reading. Many of the invitations to write might suggest that students remember or invent incidents/situations/feelings suggested by a literary work, and develop them.

Students need to be taught that there are various possible ways of making meaning out of experience, either literary or otherwise, and that they have to exercise some responsibility in choosing. They need to know that telling their own stories is a perfectly legitimate, respectable act. They need to know, too, that setting a constraining question, perhaps "What did the writer intend in this work?" is also reasonable. And they need to learn that the writing these two different tasks might lead to would have to be judged by different criteria. The narrative

cannot be evaluated as an argument, nor the argument judged as a story.

Although we have a great many ideas about how we might teach individual literature lessons, we still face the complex problem of devising a structure for the entire curriculum in literature. Most textbook series, I think, and most school curricula, follow designs that don't sustain the sort of teaching that we'd like to see, and, in fact, lure teachers away from it. The typical high school text, arranged by historical periods at one level, perhaps by genre at another, implicitly if not subtly encourages the teacher to emphasize history or genre. Most literature textbooks and curricula have found their organizing principles in the body of information we have about literature, the facts, the terms, the observable content, the testable data - knowledge, as compilers of dictionaries of cultural literacy conceive of it.

Some series have been arranged around themes, but those themes also seem to have arisen primarily from a consideration of the texts, rather than of the possible encounters with the texts. They have always reflected more time in the library than with adolescent readers. Still, we ought to be able to combine what we know about adolescent development, about the recurring issues and themes of our literature, about reading interests, about literary theory, and about learning to write, and find somewhere in all of it a structure that is not just logical, but also psychologically valid.

There ought to be some correlation between what students go through as they grow up and what great writers have written about. For instance, one of the great themes of western literature is romance and love; one of the great issues of adolescence is "the chase"; and clearly one of the reading interests of adolescents is sex and romance. The connection suggests that the literature curriculum could respect both the concerns of the students and the literary heritage.

Similarly, one of the themes is coming-of-age; one of the tasks of adolescent development is getting out from under parents' thumbs and acquiring some autonomy; and one of the reading interests of early adolescence is animal stories. Those are stories in which the child is depend*ed* upon - by Lassie or Black Beauty or another creature - rather than depend*ent* upon. In other words, the central figure is a child coming-of-age, demonstrating some autonomy and self-reliance. It's possible that those stories satisfy students, not so much because they are about animals, but because they happen to address the human issue children begin to confront about the time they hit junior high school.

It may be possible, in other words, for us to look for organizing principles in the transactions between reader and text. That's a less precise, concrete, tangible basis for a textbook or a curriculum, but if we could come up with something workable, it might be a much more powerful and interesting program. Speculation about the correlations between literary themes and patterns of growth and interest might be fed both by studies of adolescent development and by studies of reading interest. Havighurst's (1972) work, out-of-date, and probably sex-biased, suggests some of the possibilities. Among the ten or so "developmental tasks of adolescence" that he identified are several that sound like statements of the themes running through much of our literature:

Achieving new and more mature relations with age-mates of both sexes.

Achieving a masculine or feminine social role.

Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults.

Achieving assurance of economic independence.

Preparing for marriage and family life.

Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior.

Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior. (p. 45-69)

It's conceivable that analysis of such studies as this one might guide our selection and arrangement of literary selections. If one of the tasks of adolescence is "achieving mature relations with age-mates of both sexes" then the literature dealing with romance and awakening sexuality is surely relevant and likely to be of interest to the young reader. Romeo and Juliet's place in the curriculum is then justified, not only because it represents Shakespeare's art, but also because it speaks directly about an issue of burning importance to the reader. It's justification derives, then, from the transaction we might it expect it to promote, as well as from textual or historical features. If we could learn enough about adolescent psychology, we might be able to develop a literature curriculum that would promote reflection upon one's own experiences, informed by the similar reflections of the great writers. The great literature would be more in such a curriculum than mere artifacts to be acquired, to be exposed to as if they were inoculations of culture. Instead they would be there because they invite students into the ongoing dialogue of the culture about its most significant issues. Literature would become, in Kenneth Burke's (1957) words, "equipment for living." It might help students learn to assimilate the literature into their intellectual and emotional lives, and convince them that literature is more than just material with which to play critical or interpretive games.

Rosenblatt and other critical theorists have suggested some directions for us. We have devised a wide array of strategies for the classroom. Our next step is redesigning the curriculum. Neither chronology nor genre seem to give us appropriate principles, but it may be possible, if we struggle with it long enough, to devise a structure that respects the uniqueness and individuality of the reader. I suspect that such a structure will recognize the potential in literary experience for learning about ourselves, about those who surround us, about the devious and beautiful ways texts work upon us, about the myriad of factors that contribute to the making of meaning, and about the rich reservoir of strategies by which we might make sense of life and texts.

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